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25TH DYNASTY

والعشرون الخامسة الأسرة

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والعشرون الخامسة الأسرة

Jeremy Pope

25. Dynastie
25^e dynastie

The era of the 25th Dynasty during the eighth and seventh centuries BCE witnessed the annexation of Egypt by kings from the neighboring land of Kush. The phrase "Twenty-fifth Dynasty" may therefore refer to either this family of royals, the state they commanded, or the historical period of their rule, but in each case research has consistently focused on the regime's foreign aspect and its possible effects. The sequence of discovery has also proven especially consequential: not only have sources known first to scholarship shaped the interpretation of evidence found later, but the modern political contexts of those earliest discoveries have left a lasting and often misleading impression upon subsequent understanding of the period. As a result, fundamental assumptions made by scholars during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been drawn into question during the twenty-first century through a reevaluation of that evidence, particularly in debates related to the dynasty's origins, chronology, and statecraft.

خلال الأسرة الخامسة والعشرين وتحديداً في القرنين الثامن والسابع قبل الميلاد ، استولى على مصر ملوك من الأرض الكوشية المجاورة. وعلى الرغم من أن مصطلح "الأسرة الخامسة والعشرون" ربما يشير إلى هذه العائلة الحاكمة ، أو إلى الدولة التي حكموها ، أو إلى الفترة التاريخية لحكمهم ، فقد ركزت الأبحاث باستمرار على المظاهرة الأجنبية للنظام الحكم. أثر التتابع الذي تم فيه اكتشاف الأدلة بشكل كبير على المعرفة: فلم تشكل المصادر الأولى المعروفة تفسيراً للأدلة التي تم العثور عليها لاحقاً ، ولكن السياقات السياسية لتلك الاكتشافات المبكرة تركت في كثير من الأحيان انطباعاً مضللاً عن فهمنا اللاحق لهذه الفترة. ونتيجة لذلك ، فإن الفرضيات التي طرحها العلماء خلال القرنين التاسع عشر والعشرين أصبحت الآن موضع تساؤل من خلال إعادة تقييم تلك الأدلة ، لا سيما في المناقشات المتعلقة بأصول السلالة وتسلسلها التاريخي.

In Manetho's *Aegyptiaca*, the distinguishing characteristic of Egypt's 25th Dynasty was the "Aithiopian" origin shared by all its kings (3.66-67). That the dynasty hailed specifically from the land of Kush, part of the Nubian

region on the Sudanese Middle Nile (fig. 1), is clarified by the location of its excavated royal tombs (Dunham 1950: 55-71; 1955: 6-16), as well as by the dynasty's own inscriptions, Neo-Assyrian texts, and later the Hebrew Bible.



Figure 1. Map of northeast Africa during the first millennium BCE, overlaid with approximate modern boundaries.

While the 25th Dynasty was neither the first nor the last to bring foreign ancestry to the Egyptian throne, their rule did bear certain distinguishing characteristics and effects. Unlike the Libyan kings who immediately preceded them in Egypt, the Kushite monarchs all seem to have been buried outside of Egypt's borders, and they ruled Egypt and their Kushite homeland simultaneously in what has been termed a "Double Kingdom" (Maspero 1906: 138; Pope 2014a). Yet, unlike the Persians and Ptolemies who would follow them, Egypt's Kushite kings used the Egyptian language and writing system as their only surviving medium of record—even in Kush—and they exhibited an unusual devotion to Egypt's religious, artistic, and literary traditions. As a result, the 25th Dynasty has defied simplistic categorization as either "foreign" or "Egyptianized," and many fundamental assumptions about the period have been drawn into question during the twenty-first century through a reevaluation of the available evidence.

Sources of Evidence

Interpretation of the 25th Dynasty has been influenced by the sequence and modern contexts in which relevant sources of ancient evidence were discovered: those known first to modern scholarship were textual and external to both Kush and Egypt, and they shaped the questions that were subsequently asked of other written sources, architecture, and material culture later documented through epigraphy, survey, and excavation. The Hebrew Bible stands at the head of this chain of influence, with its explicit references to "Tirhakah (Taharqo), king of Kush" (2 Kings 19:9; Isaiah 37:9), as well as several more ambiguous passages describing Kush and Egypt of the eighth and seventh centuries BCE (Sadler 2005). These had already piqued the interest of a number of European authors during the High Middle Ages (Rosenberg 1980: 386). Early modern scholarship on the 25th Dynasty then combined the Hebrew Bible with rediscovered ancient Greek texts—chiefly Herodotus's anecdotes regarding the "Aithiopian" king Σαβακῶς (*Histories* 2.139; Török 2014: 73-80), supplemented by

tantalizing allusions to the dynasty by Manetho (3.66-67), Diodorus Siculus (1.65), Strabo (*Geography* 1.3.21, 15.1.6), and Jerome's Latin glosses to the *Chronicle* of Eusebius (Depuydt 2001). During the nineteenth century, the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs combined with the Turco-Egyptian invasion of Sudan to afford scholars a more internal view of the 25th Dynasty, including not only texts commissioned by the Kushite kings and their officials in Egypt, but also a series of lengthy royal inscriptions found in Kush itself at Gebel Barkal (Grimal 1981a; 1981b: 3-20, pls. Ia-IV). These advances coincided with the successful translation of Neo-Assyrian references to the 25th Dynasty that were used to clarify its chronology and foreign policy.

It was not until the early twentieth century that the construction of the Aswan Low Dam spurred the first attempts at large-scale and systematic excavation south of Egypt—first in Lower Nubia and eventually farther afield in Upper Nubia. While early excavations focused on museum pieces and public architecture, they also uncovered a broader diversity of material culture and private burials (Adams 1977: 71-80; Morkot 2000: 23-31). With new research methods and categories of evidence came at least the potential for a new perspective: the 25th Dynasty was no longer viewed exclusively as a family or regime but instead increasingly as a political state and historical period in which non-royal persons also lived. In the middle of the twentieth century, the Aswan High Dam necessitated a UNESCO Salvage Operation that gave further energy to this epistemological transformation (Adams 1977: 81-88; Morkot 2000: 31-32), and in the twenty-first century, successive archaeological rescue campaigns near the Third and Fourth Cataracts have expanded the corpus of relevant evidence (Näser and Lange 2007). Numerous excavations have continued in recent years at key sites of the period, including Dukki Gel, Tombos, Kawa, Gebel Barkal, el-Kurru, Sanam, Dangeil, and Meroe, and both field and archival research continue to unearth relevant inscriptions for translation and analysis (e.g., Hourdin 2013; Pope 2014a: 59-145; 2015: 358; Payraudeau 2015: 1604-1611).

Yet our developing understanding of the 25th Dynasty is not dependent upon the discovery of new material. Because of the problematic manner in which the Hebrew Bible, Greek texts, Egyptian inscriptions, and modern politics have shaped interpretation, current debates involve significant reevaluation of older assumptions. The summary that follows is organized around three such debates related to the 25th Dynasty's origins, chronology, and statecraft.

Origins

On the basis of ancient evidence alone, the persistent controversy over the origins of the 25th Dynasty might seem unnecessary; after all, Neo-Assyrian texts, the Hebrew Bible, and the dynasty's own inscriptions repeatedly affirm its association with the land of Kush. Yet evidence is not interpreted in a vacuum, and a significant share of the evidence for the 25th Dynasty was discovered during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, when Turco-Egyptian and later British forces invaded and subjugated the Nubian region of Sudan. Authors of the period explicitly invoked ideologies of "race" as justification, not only for modern imperial hierarchies, but also for historical theories that privileged the role of external stimuli in antiquity and downplayed the agency and capacity of historical actors who were deemed "African," "Negro," or "black" (Trigger 1994). Two overlapping hypotheses about the origins of the 25th Dynasty initially resulted: Heinrich Brugsch's theory that the rise of the dynasty had been inspired by Egyptian refugees (1891: 387), and George Reisner's assumption that the dynasty itself was actually composed of Libyan kings (1918: 80-81; 1920: 63-64; 1921: 26-28; 1923: 38). Reisner's hypothesis of Libyan ancestry was radically at odds with the bulk of textual and archaeological evidence, so it was gradually discarded by scholars (Dunham 1947: 3; Thabit 1959; Gardiner 1961: 340; Dixon 1964: 130).

Brugsch's theory of Egyptian stimulus has proven more enduring but no less controversial (Morkot 2003). Given how extensively the 25th Dynasty promoted cultural

practices that were first attested in Egypt, it is logical to expect that at least some of their familiarity with those practices would have been mediated by actual Egyptian visitors to Nubia. Far less obvious are the timing and status of those Egyptian visitors. Were they recent émigrés of high clerical office who directly tutored the Kushite dynasts in Egyptian cultural traditions, as imagined by Brugsch and still maintained by some prominent scholars (Kendall 1999; Assmann 2001: 319-320)? Or might they instead have included Egyptian officials, soldiers, and merchants who interacted with local elites in Nubia through a gradual process of mutual influence over the course of centuries or even millennia, as argued by other recent and current scholars (Adams 1977: 247; Török 1999; 2002: 1-2; Smith and Buzon 2013; Smith 2014; Buzon, Smith, and Simonetti 2016)? Attempts to differentiate between these two scenarios are affected by estimates of the scale and cultural orientation of the polities that immediately preceded the 25th Dynasty in Nubia, but the evidentiary basis for such estimates remains notoriously sparse: between the end of the New Kingdom Egyptian empire in Nubia during the eleventh century BCE and the rise of the 25th Dynasty three centuries later, there are few surviving examples of either public architecture or inscriptions. Early Nubiologists therefore supposed that the Egyptian empire had withdrawn from Nubia, leaving behind a depopulated and isolated territory of small chiefdoms in a "Dark Age" of roughly 300 years (see bibliography in Heidorn 1992: 8-23). According to the theory, new Egyptian stimulus in the eighth century BCE then consolidated these chiefdoms rapidly to form the 25th Dynasty. This explanation of the dynasty's origins has not been conclusively disproven, and it still echoes in some reference works (Assmann 2001: 319-320; Kitchen 2001: 457-461)—albeit without endorsement of the racial ideologies that gave it rise.

Yet more recent scholarship has challenged the theory of a Nubian "Dark Age" on multiple grounds. First, the decline of the Egyptian empire in Nubia was accompanied by the development of a splinter faction under the

command of the Viceroy of Kush Panehesy, so Stuart Tyson Smith observes that the lived experience of the eleventh century BCE in Nubia may have been less that of an Egyptian withdrawal than a Nubian secession (2019). Second, Bruce Williams’s chronological analysis of Lower Nubian burials has drawn into question scholars’ earlier assumption of regional depopulation during the late New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period (1990: 44). Third, John Darnell has argued that a lengthy inscription found at Semna (fig. 2) was commissioned by a Nubian queen regent who displayed a marked devotion to the Amun cult and a command of Late Egyptian grammar and paleography during the purported cultural isolation of the “Dark Age” (2006). Fourth, Alexey Vinogradov has reevaluated another inscription long thought to explicitly characterize an ancestor of the 25th Dynasty as a mere “chieftain” (𓆎 *wr*): Vinogradov asserts that the passage in question should instead be

read as a claim that said ancestor was the “eldest” (𓆎 *smsw*) among his siblings and a full-fledged “son of Ra” according to the pharaonic model (1999). Fifth, a sandstone stela (figs. 3 and 4) previously believed to describe the rapid annexation of Upper Egypt by the Kushite king Piankhy (also called Piye) has been studied anew by Angelika Lohwasser in collaboration with Anne Sörgel, who propose that the stela and the annexation it describes more likely belong to the reign of his predecessor, Kashta (Lohwasser 2017: 125). Sixth, Frédéric Payraudeau has discovered further support for this early annexation on a stela fragment inscribed for Kashta at Karnak Temple (Payraudeau 2015: 1604-1611). As a consequence of these recent studies, the older theory of a Nubian “Dark Age” has been considerably undermined—and, with it, the assumption that the 25th Dynasty consolidated rapidly as a result of Egyptian stimulus during the eighth century BCE.



Figure 2. Katimala Inscription from Semna, now at the Sudan National Museum.



Figure 3.
Left side of Barkal Sandstone Stela (Sudan
National Museum 1851).



Figure 4.
Right side of Barkal Sandstone Stela (Sudan
National Museum 1851).

If the primary impetus for the rise of the 25th Dynasty did not come from Egyptian refugees, a question remains as to precisely where in Nubia itself the Kushite royal family originated. Three principal theories have been entertained: that the dynasty hailed from Meroe in the far south, that it emerged from Napata near the Fourth Cataract, or that it stemmed from the diplomatic intermarriage of different families representing multiple regions within Nubia. First proposed in the early twentieth century (Garstang and Sayce 1912: 57), the case for Meroe was then advanced by numerous scholars (Bakr 1971: 100; Hakem 1975; Priese 1978; Bradley 1982 and 1984; Damiano 1985; O'Connor 1993: 67-69; Zibelius-Chen 1999: 705). Many of these authors noted that Meroe was inhabited at least as early as the ninth century BCE (Shinnie and Anderson 2004: 85; Grzymski 2005: 49, 54, 57; 2008: 227, 234), and that, during the two centuries that followed, small plaques, scarabs, and rings found in its cemeteries bore names of the 25th Dynasty's kings (Pope 2014a: 11). However, the present author has recently cautioned that these objects could have been trade goods or diplomatic gifts sent to Meroe's provincial elites from a 25th Dynasty centered elsewhere in Nubia (Pope 2014a: 15). Moreover, I observe that no firm evidence has yet been found of either a royal burial or a royal monument constructed at Meroe either before or during the era of the 25th Dynasty, and no surviving text from the period even mentions the site or its local gods. It is only *after* the mid-seventh century BCE that royal kin and monuments are attested so far south, eventually precipitating several references to the city and its gods in written sources, and this apparent rise in royal interest coincides with a sharp drop in non-royal burials at Meroe (Pope 2014a: 15-16, 22, 30-31). I therefore favor an alternative theory promoted by László Török (1997b: 20 n. 19) that would place the geographic origins of the 25th Dynasty in the Napata region at or near Gebel Barkal—the royal family's principal Nubian site for temple construction (Dunham 1970: 12-60) and the most important station within its coronation rituals as described in royal texts (Török 1992). Indeed, every king of the 25th Dynasty was

buried in one of the neighboring cemeteries (Dunham 1950: 55-71; 1955: 6-16), and a later inscription commemorating the dynasty's progenitor appears to place his hometown across the river from Gebel Barkal (Schäfer 1901: Taf. II; Pope 2014a: 20). Nevertheless, it is by no means obvious that the 25th Dynasty should have hailed from only a single locale within Nubia, and thus Robert Morkot (2000: 155-156, 312 n. 22) has suggested that early royal construction in the Third Cataract region (Pope 2014a: 47) might indicate that at least one branch of the family had originated there. Significantly, the theories proposed by Török, Morkot, and the current author would place the ancestors of the 25th Dynasty in parts of Nubia that had maintained close and relatively continuous economic and cultural ties to Egypt across the preceding centuries—perhaps obviating the need for any sudden stimulus from the north in the eighth century BCE.

At a deeper conceptual level, Bruce Williams has problematized a fundamental assumption underlying most debates about the origins of the 25th Dynasty—namely, the sharp dichotomy alleged to separate properly “Nubian” cultural practices from those of Egypt. Observing the frequency with which Nubians and Egyptians adapted, abandoned, and later resuscitated specific, shared cultural practices over the course of millennia, Williams concludes that “the essential structure and symbolism of Egyptian culture” will have held meaning for Nubians even before the rise of the 25th Dynasty (1999: 383-384; see also Williams 1991). Viewed in this light, the 25th Dynasty's attempted stewardship of Egyptian territory and culture would not require an abrupt stimulus from the north but might instead manifest the political mobilization of longstanding Nubian self-perception (Török 2002: 1-2, 486-487). As an illustrative case, Williams cites the Great Triumphal Stela of Kashta's successor, the Kushite king Piankhy. This detailed historical narrative asserts unequivocally that Piankhy had Kushite generals already stationed in Upper Egypt, was entreated as an ally by Thebans, regarded the Egyptian temples as part of his own cultural patrimony, and eventually marched northward to intervene in an Egyptian civil war (Grimal

1981a). The absence of Piankhy's name from both the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Greek corpus serves as a reminder that the sources known first to modern scholarship contained only a fraction of the evidence needed to reconstruct and understand the history of the 25th Dynasty.

Chronology

Debates over the chronology of the 25th Dynasty reveal most clearly how the sequence of discovery has shaped interpretation. Manetho's list of the "Aithiopian" kings made no mention of Piankhy, instead commencing the dynasty with a monarch called *Σαβακῶν* (3.66-67). When Egyptian hieroglyphs were first deciphered in the early nineteenth century, European explorers quickly matched this ancient Greek spelling to the name of *Š3-b3-k3* in the monumental record, and so the king who followed him in Manetho's list, *Σεβιχῶς*, was in turn equated with another Kushite, *Š3-b3-t3-k3* (e.g., Hoskins 1835: 303-305). Although no vowels were written in the Egyptian script, historians then began to distinguish the names *Š3-b3-k3* and *Š3-b3-t3-k3* by different sets of imagined vowels reflecting their assumed equivalences in Manetho's list: *Š3-b3-k3* was rendered as "Shabako" to match Manetho's *Σαβακῶν*, whereas *Š3-b3-t3-k3* was rendered as "Shebitku" to match Manetho's *Σεβιχῶς* (e.g., Dunham 1950: 55, 67). The 15 regnal years attested in Egypt for Shabako were then placed before the mere three attested in Egypt for Shebitku, and the resulting chronology was widely accepted by scholars until the end of the twentieth century.

In 1999, the publication of a Neo-Assyrian text inspired historians to revise the chronology — but not the sequence — of the Kushite dynasts. The Tang-i Var inscription of the Neo-Assyrian king Sargon II described events that had already been firmly dated to no later than 705 BCE, and the text explicitly named *Šá-pa-ta-ku-u'* as the ruler of Kush at that time (Frame 1999). The inclusion of *ta* in the middle of that royal name strongly advocated for its equivalence with *Š3-b3-t3-k3* (Shebitku), even though the accepted

chronology had previously estimated a much later start for his reign. So scholars devised various complex solutions: some expanded the reign of Shebitku to fill the gap between more securely dated events in the reigns of his predecessors and successors (Kahn 2001), while others proposed that his reign may have overlapped with that of Shabako in a coregency (Redford 1999)—despite the fact that no surviving Kushite monuments are double-dated to the reign of more than one pharaoh, and that some of the Kushite kings explicitly claimed they would share the kingdom with no one (Kahn 2006). More scientific methods of dating were unfortunately of little assistance, because the entirety of the 25th Dynasty falls within the Hallstatt plateau, a period for which radiocarbon dates are notoriously unreliable. Thus, even after the publication of the Tang-i Var inscription, hieroglyphic texts naming specific Kushite kings were still dated through assumed correspondences to names that Manetho had rendered in Greek nearly four hundred years after the end of Kushite rule in Egypt. Because it was known first to modern scholars, Manetho's text shaped the interpretation of later archaeological and epigraphic discoveries—with sweeping consequences for the reconstruction of cultural development and political history in the 25th Dynasty, as explained further below.

It was not until the second decade of the twenty-first century that scholars began to give priority to the Kushite and Egyptian monumental record in determining the order of Kushite royal succession. In accordance with this principle, several scholars have reassessed a large and diverse corpus of evidence stretching across most of the Double Kingdom, from temples, royal tombs, and genealogies, to private papyri and donation stelae (Bányai 2013, 2015; Payraudeau 2014; Broekman 2015; Dodson 2016: 115, 149; Agut and Moreno García 2016: 552-555; Jurman 2017). They have concluded that texts and monuments from the reign of Shebitku actually predate the reign of Shabako, effectively reversing the order of the two kings (fig. 5).

Now that Manetho's list has been revisited in light of this evidence, scholars have realized

Redford 1999	Kahn 2001	Payraudeau 2014
Alara	Alara	Alara
Kashta	Kashta	Kashta (? – 744 BC)
Piankhy (? – ca. 713 BC)	Piankhy (753 – 721 BC)	Piankhy (744 – 714 BC)
Shabako (ca. 713 BC – 699 BC)	Shabako (721 – 707/6 BC)	Shabatako (714 – 705 BC)
Shabatako (ca. 705 – 690 BC)	Shabatako (707/6 – 690 BC)	Shabako (705 – 690 BC)
Taharqo (690 – 664 BC)	Taharqo (690–664 BC)	Taharqo (690 – 664 BC)
Tanutamani (664 – ?656 BC)	Tanutamani (664 – ?656 BC)	Tanutamani (664 – ?656 BC)

Figure 5. Three proposed chronologies of the 25th Dynasty. Only names shown against a white background were assigned dates by the authors cited, but the order and dates given for others in the chart are widely accepted. Only Σαβακῶν, Σεβιχῶς, and Τάρκος were recalled by Manetho, but Herodotus's Σαβακῶς appears to have encompassed the actions of Piankhy and Tanutamani (2.139, 2.152; Török 2014: 78–79).

that both Σαβακῶν and Σεβιχῶς are in fact potential Greek renderings of either Š3-*h3-k3* or Š3-*h3-t3-k3*. Historians' conventional spelling of Š3-*h3-t3-k3* as “Shebitku” should not be mistaken for evidence of that king's equivalence with Σεβιχῶς, because it was actually the unwarranted assumption of that equivalence that gave rise to the modern spelling in the first place. A more neutral and consistent method would instead render the names Š3-*h3-t3-k3* and Š3-*h3-k3* as “Shabataka” and “Shabaka,” respectively—or possibly as “Shabatako” and “Shabako,” if the final syllable in both was the Meroitic demonstrative pronoun *-ko/-go* with copula *-o*, as linguists now suspect (Rilly 2007: 21; 2016; Rilly and de Voogt 2012: 13, 164–166; note similarly the UEE's preferred spellings of “Shabaqo” and “Shabitqo”).

The revised sequence of Kushite kings will need to be tested in the coming years (e.g., Morkot 2017: 108), but it has been taken quite seriously by leading scholars in the field. If it continues to withstand scrutiny, we may need to reevaluate other aspects of the period's history that were dependent upon the older chronology—chief among them, the 25th Dynasty's involvement in foreign affairs.

Statecraft

The sequence and modern contexts of discovery have also combined to shape interpretation of the 25th Dynasty's political strategy, once again yielding questionable

assumptions. Based upon their reading of Manetho, scholars of the twentieth century consistently placed the tenure of Shabako before that of Shabatako and contrasted their reigns as proof of Egyptian decline under the early Kushite regime. Since Shabako's name was found far more frequently in Egypt and the Near East than that of Shabatako (Pope 2014b: 115–117), it was widely assumed that Kushite efforts to rule all Egypt had foundered (e.g., James 1991: 703), Kushite attempts to annex the Levant had backfired (Redford 1985: 15; Kitchen 1986: 385, 557; Morkot 2000: 217), and Egypt's international status had waned by the end of the eighth century BCE (Adams 1977: 246). Modern ideologies of “race” were also explicitly invoked to characterize the 25th Dynasty as “inglorious” (Breasted 1905: 553–560), and both popular and scholarly publications repeatedly asserted that a Kushite alliance with Jerusalem in 701 BCE had produced immediate failure.

Critique of this theory initially came from outside of academia at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In 2002, Henry Aubin published *The Rescue of Jerusalem: The Alliance between Hebrews and Africans in 701 BC*, in which he observed that the interests of both Kush and Jerusalem were ultimately served well by their alliance: Assyrian forces did not advance into Egypt at that time; the Kushite regime in Egypt enjoyed access to Levantine imports for the next 20 years; Jerusalem survived the Assyrian invasion; Jerusalem's king, Hezekiah, retained his throne; the town's elites were not executed; and the prevailing religion developed

over the next century into the world's first Abrahamic monotheism. Aubin further argued that Kushite soldiers (e.g., figs. 6-7) under the command of their general and future king, Taharqo, had contributed significantly to these outcomes by dissuading the scattered Assyrian troops from continuing their siege of Jerusalem. According to Aubin, the Kushites did *not* achieve a decisive military victory over the Assyrians; instead, the 25th Dynasty and its Judahite allies reached a “negotiated settlement” with Assyria (2002: 152), and subsequent authors of the Hebrew Bible then wrote of the Kushites in generally positive terms. Aubin’s thesis received little attention between 2002 and 2019, at which point it was favorably reviewed at length by a group of Egyptologists and biblicists—and then supported more convincingly by Aubin himself (Aubin *fc.*; Bellis *fc.*; Dodson *fc.*; Grabbe *fc.*; Hays *fc.*; Lavik *fc.*; Park *fc.*; Pope *fc.* a). The revised chronology of the 25th Dynasty discussed above also lends further plausibility to Aubin’s argument: if Shabatako’s reign preceded that of Shabako, then the greater international prominence of the latter could have directly resulted from the Kushites’ alliance with Jerusalem in 701 BCE (Dodson *fc.*; Pope *fc.* a). The debate is by no means closed, but alternative explanations for Jerusalem’s survival have yet to be supported in comparable depth.



Figure 6. Iron spearhead found in 25th-Dynasty burial at Tombos (see fig. 7).



Figure 7. Skeleton of a man buried at Tombos during the 25th Dynasty, dated by means of associated pottery and a green faience scarab bearing the names of pharaoh Shabako. The skeleton has been considered that of a warrior based upon the inclusion in his grave of microlithic arrowheads, an iron javelin, iron harpoon points, and an iron spearhead (see fig. 6).

This reevaluation of Kush’s alliance with Jerusalem resonates with other scholarship on the 25th Dynasty’s domestic and foreign policy. While Egyptologists once assumed that the Kushites had tried and failed to impose an imperial regime over both Egypt and the Levant, further research has yielded other explanations. Drawing from David Edwards’s (1996) and Dorian Fuller’s (2003) work on later Kushite history, Kathryn Howley proposes that Piankhy’s campaign into Egypt sought to expand his ritual authority, wealth, and military capacity as the head of a “segmentary state,” but without the administration of a centralized bureaucracy commanding a redistributive economy (Howley 2015). Lower Egyptian challenges to that authority were initially met with episodic displays of Kushite and Upper Egyptian force, culminating with the residence

of Kushite kings on Egyptian soil—first that of Shabatako at Thebes, then that of Shabako at Memphis (if one accepts the new chronology). According to both Török and Pope, the foreign policy of the 25th Dynasty during those same decades prioritized the defense of Egypt’s borders and long-distance trade over any possible ambitions of territorial acquisition, garrisoning, or sustained military deployment in the Near East (Török 1997a: 166-167; Pope 2014b: 106, 130, 141, 159). By the reign of Shabako’s successor, Taharqo (fig. 8), the dynasty’s monumental construction, artistic production, and international trade had reached new heights (Török 2002: 40-148, 259-306) by courting, rather than replacing, local officeholders, aristocracies, and ateliers in Egypt (Pope 2014a: 203, 235-255, 278-279). This combination of strategies does not adhere to the traditional model of Egyptian pharaonic rule, with its multi-tiered civil bureaucracy and imperial designs abroad. Yet it must be remembered that the 25th Dynasty was not only a period of Egyptian history; it was also a new political configuration under the rule of Kushite kings who had subsumed Egyptian territories within a much larger realm. In this regard, the “Double Kingdom” involved non-Egyptian and non-royal actors whose participation in the state was seldom commemorated in the official record (e.g., fig. 9).



Figure 8. Painted relief depicting Taharqo in Temple B 300 at Gebel Barkal.



Figure 9. Relief scene depicting musicians at south end of hypostyle hall in Temple T at Kawa.



Figure 10. Statuette of the Kushite God's Wife of Amun, Amenirdis I (BM EA 46699).

For an improved understanding of statecraft in the 25th Dynasty, one additional through-line may prove crucial to future research: the prominent role of Kushite royal women. It has long been recognized that women frequently served as monarchs during many epochs of Nubian history—from the enigmatic “Kerman queen” of the second millennium BCE (Minor 2018) to the famous *kandakes* of the Meroitic era in the final centuries BCE and early centuries CE (e.g., Acts 8:27). The first named ruler in Nubia during the Third Intermediate Period was also a woman (Katimala, see fig. 2 above) who

appeared to rule alone during at least the latter part of her tenure. Thus, Angelika Lohwasser has proposed a theory of gender complementarity in Kush, where “[k]ingship is impossible without queenship” (Lohwasser 2001 a and b; Becker, Blöbaum, and Lohwasser 2017: 40). Yet the assertion of Kushite power in Egypt during the 25th Dynasty was characterized by a more distinctive form of feminine authority: the appointment of a Kushite royal daughter as the God's Wife of Amun—effectively the high priestess in Thebes—beginning with Kashta's daughter Amenirdis I (fig. 10). The God's Wives of the 25th Dynasty then assumed royal titularies and cartouches on the model of the pharaoh himself (Pope 2013), and Amenirdis I even employed her own personal envoy to Nubia (Moss 1960). A compendium of essays published in 2017 examines the office of God's Wife from multiple angles and poses the question of whether holders of the title exercised “actual” authority or only “ritual” authority (Becker, Blöbaum, and Lohwasser 2017: 3, 5, 13). The distinction between these two forms of power seems particularly illusory in the Kushite case, because the actions of a high priestess may prove no less effective than those of a bureaucrat in securing loyalists and mobilizing labor within a “segmentary state” (Pope 2018: 53). Whether and specifically how these ends were pursued by the Kushite God's Wives remains a difficult question for future research, but the office appears to have been the most enduring manifestation of Kushite power on the Lower Nile. After Taharqo and his successor, Tanutamani, were expelled from Egypt by a Neo-Assyrian invasion (Onasch 1994) and then replaced by a Saite regime, the Kushite God's Wife Shepenwepet II remained in office for several years (Hourdin 2013; Pope 2013: 209-211)—becoming perhaps the last acting member of Egypt's 25th Dynasty.

Bibliographic Notes

Essential overviews of the 25th Dynasty and its historiography include László Török's *The Kingdom of Kush* (1997a) and his *Image of the Ordered World in Ancient Nubian Art* (2002), as well as Robert Morkot's *The Black Pharaohs: Egypt's Nubian Rulers* (2000). Many of the earliest excavations relevant to the era were described initially by the lead excavators in journal articles, while their fuller publication in book form was accomplished decades later by assistants. Thus, George Reisner's excavations at Gebel Barkal and the royal cemeteries of el-Kurru and Nuri were later published by Dows Dunham (1970; 1950; 1955), whereas Francis Llewellyn Griffith's work at Kawa was documented in a four-volume series by Miles F.L. Macadam (1949; 1955). For the dynasty's influence in Thebes, Jean Leclant's two-volume catalog of monuments and inscriptions remains indispensable (1965). The available bibliography on the 25th Dynasty also includes several areas that were mentioned only briefly in the essay above—such as art, inscriptions, mechanisms of royal succession, and non-royal society. A seminal study of royal sculpture in the round (Russmann 1974) was followed within a few years by a groundbreaking exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum that was subsequently published with explanatory essays (Wenig 1978). The end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first have witnessed not only a spate of similar exhibitions (e.g., Wildung 1998) but also a number of studies focused on individual aspects of the period's art (e.g., Török 1987). For the textual production of the 25th Dynasty, the first volume of the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum* series (Eide et al. 1994) provides transliterations and translations of nearly all the royal inscriptions. Alongside a thorough edition of Piankhy's Great Triumphal Stela (Grimal 1981a), detailed photographs and hand copies of Tanutamani's Dream Stela (Grimal 1981b) have facilitated philological and historical analysis of the latter by Breyer (2003) and Sargent (2004). For the inscriptions commissioned by Taharqo, Macadam's (1949) editions are supplemented by the works of Dallibor (2005) and Pope (2014a). Less attention has been devoted to the royal inscriptions *as histories* (Pope *fc. b*), but Shabako's Memphite Theology has long been approached as a philosophical text (e.g., Breasted 1901). Though the mechanisms of royal succession are still disputed, Kahn's (2005) study provides a recent overview with extensive bibliography. Beyond the royal court, its succession, and its artistic and textual projects, broader society under the 25th Dynasty may be glimpsed in numerous cemeteries (Griffith 1923; Dunham 1963; Lohwasser 2010, 2012), private statuary and inscriptions (Pope *fc. c*), and several Abnormal Hieratic papyri from the Theban region (e.g., Donker van Heel 1997, 1998 a and b, 1999). Ongoing excavations may be followed especially in the pages of the journal *Sudan & Nubia*, while historical articles appear regularly in *The Journal of Egyptian History*, as well as *Der Antike Sudan: Mitteilungen der Sudanarchaeologischen Gesellschaft zu Berlin*.

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Figure 1. Map of northeast Africa during the first millennium BCE, overlaid with approximate modern boundaries. (Courtesy of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Cartography Laboratory.)

Figure 2. Katimala Inscription from Semna, now at the Sudan National Museum. (Courtesy of Stuart Tyson Smith and the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums.)

Figure 3. Left side of Barkal Sandstone Stela (Sudan National Museum 1851). (Courtesy of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums. Photograph by Rocco Ricci © The British Museum.)

Figure 4. Right side of Barkal Sandstone Stela (Sudan National Museum 1851). (Courtesy of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums. Photograph by Rocco Ricci © The British Museum.)

Figure 5. Three proposed chronologies of the 25th Dynasty. Only names shown against a white background were assigned dates by the authors cited, but the order and dates given for others in the chart are widely accepted. Only Σαβακῶν, Σεβιχῶς, and Τάρκος were recalled by Manetho, but Herodotus's Σαβακῶς appears to have encompassed the actions of Piankhy and Tanutamani (2.139, 2.152; Török 2014: 78-79). (Chart by the author.)

Figure 6. Iron spearhead found in 25th-Dynasty burial at Tombos (see fig. 7). (Photograph courtesy of Stuart Tyson Smith.)

Figure 7. Skeleton of a man buried at Tombos during the 25th Dynasty, dated by means of associated pottery and a green faience scarab bearing the names of pharaoh Shabako. The skeleton has been considered that of a warrior based upon the inclusion in his grave of microlithic arrowheads, an iron javelin, iron harpoon points, and an iron spearhead (see fig. 6). (Photograph courtesy of Stuart Tyson Smith.)

Figure 8. Painted relief depicting Taharqo in Temple B 300 at Gebel Barkal. (Photograph taken after the restoration conducted in 2016 by the Istituto Superiore per la Conservazione ed il Restauro, Rome.)

Figure 9. Relief scene depicting musicians at south end of hypostyle hall in Temple T at Kawa. (© Griffith Institute, University of Oxford.)

Figure 10. Statuette of the Kushite God's Wife of Amun, Amenirdis I (BM EA 46699). (© The Trustees of the British Museum.)